

Narsai

Edited by
AARON M. BUTTS,
KRISTIAN S. HEAL,
and ROBERT A. KITCHEN

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Narsai

Rethinking his Work and his World

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Aaron M. Butts, Kristian S. Heal,
and Robert A. Kitchen

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Preface

The editors of the present volume direct a project to translate all the extant *mēmrē*, or metrical homilies, of Narsai (d. ca. 500) into English. The *mēmrē* are being translated by an international team of almost three dozen scholars. In the summer of 2017, the three of us – with Kristian Heal taking the lead – organized a workshop on Narsai in Provo, Utah on the beautiful campus of Brigham Young University. This workshop was an opportunity for translators associated with this project, as well as a few others, to share early gleanings from their sustained readings of Narsai. Given how little has been published on Narsai to date, it was decided that the fruits of this workshop should be collected and published. Thus, the present volume aims to disseminate to a wider audience current, on-going research being conducted on Narsai with the hope of sparking more interest in this most important and influential fifth-century figure.

Aaron M. Butts
Kristian S. Heal
Robert A. Kitchen

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Abbreviations

Journals, Series, and Reference Works

AB	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
AJP	<i>The American Journal of Philology</i>
AJSL	<i>The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures</i>
AJT	<i>Asia Journal of Theology</i>
AKM	Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes
ANF	A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (eds.), <i>The Ante-Nicene Fathers</i> (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885–1896).
AOS	American Oriental Series
BCOT	Bible in the Christian Orthodox Tradition
BÉHÉS	Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études, Sciences religieuses
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BHM	<i>Bulletin of the History of Medicine</i>
BIFAO	<i>Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale</i>
BJRULM	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
BM	Bibliothèque du Muséon
BTS	Beiruter Texte und Studien
BUSE	Bibliothèque de l'Université Saint-Esprit
BZ	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
CBP	Cahiers de Biblia Patristica
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CHRC	<i>Church History and Religious Culture</i>
CLC	Collection lettres chrétiennes
CO	<i>Christian Orient</i>
CP	<i>Classical Philology</i>
CQ	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
CS	Cistercian Studies
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
CSQ	<i>Cistercian Studies Quarterly</i>
CUA SCA	Catholic University of America Studies in Christian Antiquity
CW	<i>The Classical Weekly</i>
DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
EBCO	Eichstätter Beiträge zum Christlichen Orient
ECCA	Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity
ECR	<i>Eastern Churches Review</i>
ÉS	Études syriaques
ETJ	<i>Ephrem's Theological Journal</i>
ETL	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</i>
FKDG	Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte

FoC	Fathers of the Church
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte
GECS	Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies
GEDSH	S. P. Brock, A. M. Butts, G. A. Kiraz, and L. Van Rompay (eds.), <i>Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage</i> (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2011).
GOS	Göttinger Orientforschungen, I. Reihe: Syriaca
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
Hugoye	<i>Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies</i>
JA	<i>Journal Asiatique</i>
JAJ	<i>Journal of Ancient Judaism</i>
JCPs	Jewish and Christian Perspectives Series
JCSSS	<i>Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies</i>
JECs	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
JFSR	<i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</i>
JL	Janus Linguarum
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KAL	Kommentare zur apokryphen Literatur
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LOS	London Oriental Series
LSS	Leipziger semitistische Studien, n. F.
MFC	Message of the Fathers of the Church
MPI	Monographs of The Peshitta Institute
MUSJ	<i>Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph</i>
NHMS	Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies
NHS	Nag Hammadi Studies
NPEPP	A. Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan (eds.), <i>The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics</i> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).
NPNF	P. Schaff (ed.), <i>A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church</i> (New York: Scribner, 1898–1909).
NT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
OC	<i>Oriens Christianus</i>
OCA	Orientalia Christiana Analecta
OCP	<i>Orientalia Christiana Periodica</i>
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
OPO	Orientalia – Patristica – Oecumenica
OS	<i>L'Orient Syrien</i>
PA	Philosophia Antiqua
PETSE	Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile
PG	J.-P. Migne, <i>Patrologia cursus completus, Series Graeca</i> (Paris: Bibliothecae cleri universae, 1857–1866).
PIRSB	Publications de l'Institut Romand des Sciences Bibliques

PL	J.-P. Migne, <i>Patrologia cursus completus, Series Latina</i> . (Paris: Bibliothecae cleri universae, 1844–1864).
PO	Patrologia Orientalis
PPS	Popular Patristics Series
PS	Patrologia Syriaca
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien
RAC	T. Klausner et al. (eds.), <i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i> (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1950–).
SA	Studia Anselmiana
SC	Sources chrétiennes
SCE	<i>Studies in Christian Ethics</i>
SCH	<i>Studies in Church History</i>
SCS	Syrian Churches Series
SFSHJ	South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism
SI	Studia Iranica
SJ	Studia Judaica
SOPJ	<i>Syriac Orthodox Patriarchal Journal</i>
SP	<i>Studia Patristica</i>
SSB	Semítica et Semito-hamítica Berolinensia
STAC	Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum
STJ	<i>Stulos Theological Journal</i>
SymSyr I	<i>Symposium Syriacum 1972. Célébré dans les jours 26–31 octobre 1972 à l'Institut pontifical oriental de Rome</i> (OCA 197; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1974).
SymSyr III	R. Lavenant (ed.), <i>III^e Symposium Syriacum, 1980. Les contacts du monde syriaque avec les autres cultures (Goslar 7–11 Septembre 1980)</i> (OCA 221; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1983).
SymSyr IV	H. J. W. Drijvers, R. Lavenant, C. Molenberg, and G. J. Reinink (eds.), <i>IV Symposium Syriacum, 1984. Literary Genres in Syriac Literature (Groningen – Oosterhesselen 10–12 September)</i> (OCA 229; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1987).
SymSyr V	R. Lavenant (ed.), <i>V Symposium Syriacum. Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven, 29–31 août 1988</i> (OCA 236; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1990).
SymSyr VII	R. Lavenant (ed.), <i>Symposium Syriacum VII. Uppsala University, Department of Asian and African Languages, 11–14 August 1996</i> (OCA 256; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1998).
TCH	Transformation of the Classical Heritage
TeCLA	Texts from Christian Late Antiquity
TEG	Traditio Exegetica Graeca
TS	<i>Theological Studies</i>
TT	Textes et Traditions
TTH	Translated Texts for Historians
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
TUGAL	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
VCSS	Variorum Collected Studies Series
VTQ	<i>St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly</i>

WS	<i>Wiener Studien</i>
WS	Woodbrooke Studies
WSA	Works of Saint Augustine
YJS	Yale Judaica Series
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>
ZK	<i>Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte</i>
ZMR	<i>Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft</i>
ZNF	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

Citation of *Mēm̄rē* by Narsai

Mēm̄rē by Narsai are cited according to the conventional numbering system, as established in A. Mingana, *Narsai Doctoris Syri Homiliae et Carmina* (Mosul: Typis Fratrum Praedicatorum, 1905). Short-titles are optionally included, generally based on S. P. Brock, “A Guide to Narsai’s Homilies,” *Hugoye* 12 (2009): 21–40. In addition to the *mēm̄rā* number (and optional short-title), reference is made to one of the published editions, when available, in the following format: *Mēm̄rā* 3 ‘*On the Revelation of Abraham*’ (ed. Mingana 1.58.4), where “1” refers to the volume, “58” refers to the page, and “4” refers to the line. Abbreviations for the published editions are as follows:

Frishman	J. Frishman, <i>The Ways and Means of the Divine Economy: An Edition, Translation and Study of Six Biblical Homilies by Narsai</i> (Ph.D. Diss., Universiteit Leiden, 1992).
Gignoux	P. Gignoux, <i>Homélie de Narsai sur la création</i> (PO 34.2–4; Turnhout: Brepols, 1968).
McLeod	F. G. McLeod, <i>Narsai’s Metrical Homilies on the Nativity, Epiphany, Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension</i> (PO 40.1; Turnhout: Brepols, 1979).
Mingana	A. Mingana, <i>Narsai Doctoris Syri Homiliae et Carmina</i> (Mosul: Typis Fratrum Praedicatorum, 1905).
Patriarchal Press	Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII, <i>Homilies of Mar Narsai</i> (San Francisco: Patriarchal Press, 1970).
Siman	E. P. Siman, <i>Narsai. Cinq homélie sur les paraboles évangéliques</i> (Paris: Cariscript, 1984).

If a *mēm̄rā* has not yet been edited, a reference to manuscript and folio are provided, using the same format as above, *mutatis mutandis*, e.g., *Mēm̄rā* 32 ‘*On the Canaanite Women*’ (ms. Vat. Syr. 594, f. 58a.3–4), where ‘3–4’ refers to the lines.

A reference to a published translation is sometimes added in the parenthesis, as in the following: *Mēm̄rā* 39 (ed. Mingana 1.359; trans. R. H. Connolly, *The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai* [Texts and Studies: Contributions to Biblical and Patristic Literature 8.1; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909], 36).

A similar citation system is used for homilies by Narsai’s contemporary Jacob of Serugh, with the abbreviation “Bedjan” referring to P. Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis* (Paris–Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1905–1910).

Transcription of Syriac

Consonants

Syriac consonants are transcribed as *ʿ*, *b*, *g*, *d*, *h*, *w*, *z*, *ḥ*, *ṭ*, *y*, *k*, *l*, *m*, *n*, *s*, *ṣ*, *p*, *ṣ*, *q*, *r*, *š*, and *t*.

Vowels

Transcription	Syriac Name	Examples	
<i>a</i>	<i>ptāḥā</i>	<i>malkā</i>	ܡܠܟܐ
<i>ā</i>	<i>zqāpā</i>	<i>hāšā</i>	ܚܫܐ
<i>e</i>	<i>rbāšā</i>	<i>lebbā</i>	ܠܒܐ
<i>ē</i>	<i>rbāšā (karyā)</i>	<i>lēlyā</i>	ܠܠܝܐ
<i>i</i>	<i>ḥbāšā</i>	<i>bišā</i>	ܒܝܫܐ
<i>u</i>	<i>ʿšāšā</i>	<i>gušmā</i>	ܓܘܫܡܐ
<i>o</i>	<i>ʿšāšā rwiḥā</i>	<i>gšom</i>	ܓܫܡܐ

Other

- Schwa is not indicated, e.g., *kṭab* ‘he wrote’ and not *kəṭab*.
- Gemination is indicated, e.g., *lebbā* ‘heart’ and not *lebā*.
- Spirantization (*rukkākā*) is marked as *b*, *ḡ*, *d*, *k*, *p*, and *ṭ*, e.g., *kṭab* and not *ktab*.
- *Matres lectionis* are not indicated, e.g., *gušmā* for ܓܘܫܡܐ with the *waw* not indicated.
- Apart from *matres lectionis*, ‘silent’ consonants (i.e., those with *mbaṭṭlānā*) are written within parenthesis, e.g., *malkaw(hy)* ‘his kings’ and *biš (h)u* ‘he is evil’.

Example

ܒܪܝܫܝܬ ܝܬܐܘ(ܗܝ) (ܗ)ܘܐ ܡܠܠܬܐ ܘܗܘ ܡܠܠܬܐ ܝܬܐܘ(ܗܝ) (ܗ)ܘܐ ܠܘܐܬ ܐܠܗܐ

brēšit ʾitaw(hy) (h)wā mellṭā whu mellṭa ʾitaw(hy) (h)wā lwāṭ ʾalāhā

Narsai's Life and Work*

Aaron Michael Butts

Narsai, who is variously called “the tongue of the East” and “the harp of the Spirit,” is among the most important and influential Syriac authors.¹ His life spanned the fifth century, which was a tumultuous time for Christians following the controversies surrounding the First Council of Ephesus (431), the Second Council of Ephesus (449), and the Council of Chalcedon (451) and its aftermath.² Playing a crucial role at this critical juncture, Narsai would ultimately be remembered as one of the foundational figures of the Church of the East.³

* I am grateful to Simcha Gross, Kristian Heal, Robert Kitchen, Alessandro Mengozzi, and especially Lucas Van Rompay for their constructive comments on this overview.

¹ An up-to-date biography and study of Narsai remains a *desideratum*. For now, the best overview of Narsai, albeit a brief one, is L. Van Rompay, “Narsai,” in *GEDSH*, 303–304, to which the current overview is heavily indebted. For more details, see J. Frishman, *The Ways and Means of the Divine Economy: An Edition, Translation and Study of Six Biblical Homilies by Narsai* (Ph.D. Diss., Universiteit Leiden, 1992), part 3 as well as the more-dated A. Vööbus, *History of the School of Nisibis* (CSCO 266; Leuven: Peeters, 1965), 57–121. The two epithets given above are found in the tenth-century *Chronicle of Siirt* (ed. A. Scher, J. Périer, P. Dib, and R. Griveau, *Histoire nestorienne [Chronique de Séert]* [PO 4.3, 5.2, 7.2, 13.4; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1907–1909], 2.1.114) and the *Catalogue of Books* by ‘Abdisho’ bar Brikha (d. 1318) (ed. J.S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana* [Rome: Typis Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1719–1728], 3.1.63), respectively. On the *Chronicle of Siirt*, see recently P. Wood, *The Chronicle of Seert: Christian Historical Imagination in Late Antique Iraq* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

² The last fifteen years have seen the publication of a number of important monographs on this period, including, *inter alia*, S. Wessel, *Cyril of Alexandria and the Nestorian Controversy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); V. Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); P. Wood, *We Have no King but Christ: Christian Political Thought in Greater Syria on the Eve of the Arab Conquest, 400–c.585* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); D.A. Michelson, *The Practical Christology of Philoxenos of Mabbug* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Y. Moss, *Incorruptible Bodies: Christology, Society, and Authority in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016); J. Behr, *The Case Against Diodore and Theodore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); M. Papoutsakis, *Vicarious Kingship: A Theme in Syriac Political Theology in Late Antiquity* (STAC 100; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017); P.M. Forness, *Preaching Christology in the Roman Near East: A Study of Jacob of Serugh* (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

³ For introductions to the Church of the East, see W. Baum and D.W. Winkler, *The Church of the East: A Concise History* (London: Routledge, 2003) and C. Baumer, *The Church of the East: An Illustrated History of Assyrian Christianity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006). The Church of the East is sometimes called “Nestorian,” especially in earlier scholarly literature; this term

What is known of Narsai's life derives principally from two texts associated with the School of Nisibis: *The Cause of the Foundation of the Schools* by Barḥadbshabba (late 6th/early 7th cent.) and the *Ecclesiastical History* also attributed to one Barḥadbshabba, who may or may not be the same person.⁴ According to these hagiographic narratives, Narsai was born in 'Ayn Dulba near Ma'alta in northern Mesopotamia, within the Sasanian Empire.⁵ At the age of 16, he was orphaned and came under the guardianship of his uncle Emmanuel, who was abbot of the Monastery of Kfar Mari. After spending time at the Monastery of Kfar Mari, Narsai studied at the famous School of Edessa, eventually becoming a teacher (*mallpānā*) there and ultimately its director (*rabban*).⁶ Narsai's tenure as director is said to have lasted for two decades and ended with his expulsion from the school. The exact date of Narsai's expulsion is debated, but it must have taken place before the school's closure by the emperor Zeno in 489 due to

is, however, best avoided since it is not a self-identification but rather a pejorative used by the theological opponents of the Church of the East (see S. P. Brock, "The 'Nestorian' Church: A Lamentable Misnomer," *BJRULM* 78 [1996]: 23–35; reprinted in idem, *Fire from Heaven: Studies in Syriac Theology and Liturgy* [VCSS 863; Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006], no. 1).

⁴ The former text is edited in A. Scher, *Mar Barḥadbšabba 'Arbaya. Évêque de Ḥalwan (VI^e siècle). Cause de la fondation des écoles* (PO 4.4; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1907), 319–404, with an English translation in A. H. Becker, *Sources for the Study of the School of Nisibis* (TTH 50; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), 165–171. The latter is edited in F. Nau, *La seconde partie de l'histoire de Barhadbesabba 'Arbaia* (PO 9.5; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1913), 588–615, with an English translation in Becker, *Sources for the Study of the School of Nisibis*, 40–85. For discussion of the authorship of these two texts, see A. H. Becker and J. W. Childers, "Barḥadbshabba 'Arbaya," in *GEDSH*, 57–58 and, with more detail, Becker, *Sources for the Study of the School of Nisibis*, 11–16. For the construction of Narsai in these sources, see K. Pinggéra, "Das Bild Narsais des Großen bei Barḥadbšabbā 'Arbāyā. Zum theologischen Profil der 'Geschichte der heiligen Väter'," in A. Mustafa, J. Tubach, and G. S. Vashalomidze (eds.), *Inkulturation des Christentums im Sasanidenreich* (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, 2007), 245–259. An abbreviated form of some of the material on Narsai in the *Ecclesiastical History* is also found in the *Chronicle of Siirt* (ed. A. Scher et al., *Histoire nestorienne [Chronique de Séert]*, 2.1.114–117, 136–137).

⁵ For the Sasanian context of Narsai, see S. W. Sunquist, *Narsai and the Persians: A Study in Cultural Contact and Conflict* (Ph.D. Diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1990). A new history of Syriac Christians in the Sasanian Empire is needed. The classic study of J. Labourt (*Le Christianisme dans l'empire perse sous la dynastie Sassanide* [Paris: Victor Lecoffre, 1904]) has long been outdated, in terms of data and, even more so, in terms of methodology. Better is A. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides* (Copenhagen: Levin & Munksgaard, 1936), but it is still in need of update. Several recent studies have opened new avenues of research on Christians in the Sasanian Empire, especially R. E. Payne, *A State of Mixture. Christians, Zoroastrians and Iranian Political Culture in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015) and K. Smith, *Constantine and the Captive Christians of Persia: Martyrdom and Religious Identity in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016). See also the recent overview in G. Herman, "The Syriac World in the Persian Empire," in D. King (ed.), *The Syriac World* (London: Routledge, 2019), 134–145.

⁶ For the school of Edessa, see A. H. Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia* (Divinations; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). A number of the relevant primary sources are conveniently translated in Becker, *Sources for the Study of the School of Nisibis*.

its dyophysite teaching.⁷ Expelled from the School of Edessa, Narsai proceeded to Nisibis, where he was received by Barṣawma, bishop of Nisibis.⁸ According to the texts attributed to Barḥadbshabba, Barṣawma persuaded Narsai to found a new school in Nisibis, the School of Nisibis.⁹ Narsai is said to have had a falling out with Barṣawma at some point, possibly due to the latter's marriage to a former nun, Mamai, but eventually Narsai and Barṣawma were reconciled.¹⁰ Narsai remained head of the School of Nisibis until his death sometime around 500.

At the School of Edessa, Narsai was among the first generation of Syriac authors to encounter the works of the Antiochene theologians and exegetes, which were being translated from Greek into Syriac.¹¹ These Antiochene writings would

⁷ See the discussion in A. Vööbus, "Un vestige d'une lettre de Narsai et son importance historique," *OS* (1964): 515–523, esp. 522–523; idem, *History of the School of Nisibis*, 43–44; Frishman, *The Ways and Means of the Divine Economy*, 2–3; Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom*, 74–75; Van Rompay, "Narsai," in *GEDSH*, 303.

⁸ For Barṣawma, see A. H. Becker, "Barṣawma of Nisibis," in *GEDSH*, 58–59 and, with more detail, S. Gero, *Barṣawma of Nisibis and Persian Christianity in the Fifth Century* (CSCO 426; Leuven: Peeters, 1981).

⁹ In contrast, the *Chronicle of Siirt* presents Narsai as joining an already existing school that would later be supported by Barṣawma (ed. Scher et al., *Histoire nestorienne [Chronique de Séert]*, 2.1.114).

¹⁰ The *Ecclesiastical History* of Barḥadbshabba presents Narsai as composing two *mēmre* related to this incident involving Mamai and Barṣawma: *Mēmra* 25 'On Reproof' (ed. Mingana 1.210–223) and *Mēmra* 80 'On the Reproof of Women' (ed. Mingana 2.353–365). On these two *mēmre*, see C. Molenberg, "As if from Another World: Narsai's Memra 'Bad is the Time,'" in H. L. J. Vanstiphout (ed.), *All Those Nations ... Cultural Encounters Within and With the Near East: Studies Presented to Han Drijvers at the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday by Colleagues and Students* (COMERS / ICOG Communications 2; Groningen: STYX Publications, 1999), 101–108 and eadem, "Narsai's Memra on the Reproof of Eve's Daughters and the 'Tricks and Devices' They Perform," *Le Muséon* 106 (1993): 65–87, respectively. See also Becker, *Sources for the Study of the School of Nisibis*, 67 fn. 147, who rightfully doubts the potential autobiographical nature of these two *mēmre*: It seems equally, if not more likely, that Barḥadbshabba has invented this historical context for these two *mēmre*.

¹¹ This translation activity at the School of Edessa is explicitly mentioned by Narsai's miaophysite contemporary Jacob of Serugh (d. 521) in his *Letter 14* (ed. G. Olinder, *Iacobi Sarugensis Epistolae quotquot supersunt* [CSCO 110; Leuven: Peeters, 1937], 58–61; trans. A. M. Butts, "Jacob of Serugh, *Letter 14*," in M. DelCogliano [ed.], *The Cambridge Edition of Early Christian Writings*, vol. 3. *Christ* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming]). For Jacob and his thought, see recently Forness, *Preaching Christology in the Roman Near East*. Comparisons between Narsai and Jacob have been a focus of scholarship on Narsai: See, e.g., L. Van Rompay, "Humanity's Sin in Paradise: Ephrem, Jacob of Sarug, and Narsai in Conversation," in G. A. Kiraz (ed.), *Jacob of Serugh and His Times: Studies in Sixth-Century Syriac Christianity* (GECS 8; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2010), 199–217; G. A. Anderson, "Christus Victor in the Work of Ephrem, Narsai, and Jacob of Serugh," in N. V. Harrison and D. G. Hunter (eds.), *Suffering and Evil in Early Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 57–80; R. A. Kitchen, "Three Young Men Redux: The Fiery Furnace in Jacob of Sarug and Narsai," *SP* 78 (2017): 73–84; E. G. Walsh, "Holy Boldness: Narsai and Jacob of Serugh Preaching the Canaanite Woman," *SP* 78 (2017): 85–98; M. Papoutsakis, "United in the Strife That Divided Them: Narsai and Jacob of Serugh on the Ascension of Christ," *Δελτίο Βιβλικῶν Μελετῶν* 32 (2017): 45–77.

have a deep impact on Narsai to the point that he would pen a *mēm̄rā* on the “Three Greek Doctors,” in which he traced his lineage explicitly back to Diodore of Tarsus (d. 390), Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428), and Nestorius (d. 450).¹² Among these “three Greek doctors” none was more influential on Narsai than Theodore of Mopsuestia, whose thought thoroughly imbues Narsai’s writings.¹³ At the same time, however, Narsai is also indebted to the earlier Syriac tradition, including especially Ephrem (d. 373).¹⁴ Navigating a course through this dual heritage – Ephrem on the one hand and Theodore and the other Greek Antiochenes on the other, Narsai would ultimately become the most foundational theologian articulating a dyophysite Christology in Syriac.¹⁵ Narsai’s impact is not, however, limited to Christology but extends to a number of other domains

¹² This is *Mēm̄rā II* (ed. J. P. P. Martin, “Homélie de Narsès sur les trois docteurs nestoriens,” *JA* 9.14 [1899]: 446–493 [Syriac]; 9.15 [1900]: 469–525 [French translation]). For studies, see D. Haneberg, “Drei nestorianische Kirchenlieder,” *ZDMG* 3 (1849): 231–242; P. Sfair, “L’ortodossia di Narsai rilevata dalla sua omelia sui Dottori greci,” *Bessarione* III, 14 (1917): 313–317; L. Abramowski, “Das Konzil von Chalcedon in der Homilie des Narsès über die drei nestorianischen Lehrer,” *ZK* 66 (1954–1955): 140–143; K. E. McVey, “The *Mēm̄rā* of Narsai on the Three Nestorian Doctors as an Example of Forensic Rhetoric,” in *SymSyr* III, 87–96; N. Kavvadas, “Narsais Homilie ‘Über die Väter, die Lehrer Diodor von Tarsos, Theodor von Mopsuestia und Nestorios,’” *Sacris Erudiri* 51 (2012): 215–232; E. Perotti, *I tre dottori greci e la produzione dell’ortodossia in Narsai* (M.A. Thesis, Università degli Studi di Torino, 2015).

¹³ See T. Jansma, “Études sur la pensée de Narsai. L’Homélie no XXXIV: Essai d’interprétation,” *OS* 11 (1966): 147–168, 265–290, 393–429; P. Gignoux, *Homélie de Narsai sur la création* (PO 34.2–4; Turnhout: Brepols, 1968), 470–495; Frishman, *The Ways and Means of the Divine Economy*, 3.34–37, *passim*; F. McLeod, “Narsai’s dependence on Theodore of Mopsuestia,” *JCSSS* 7 (2007): 18–38; F. Thome, “Jona – Typos Christi. Narsais Memra über Jona im Lichte der Exegese Theodors von Mopsuestia zum Jonabuch,” in D. Bumazhnov, E. Grypeou, T. Sailors, and A. Toepel (eds.), *Bibel, Byzanz und christlicher Orient: Festschrift für Stephen Gerö zum 65. Geburtstag* (OLA 187; Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 363–386; S. V. Fomicheva, “Educational Background of Mar Narsai: Between the ‘Tradition of the School’ and Theodore of Mopsuestia’s Exegesis,” in P. Bruns and T. Kremer (eds.), *Studia Syriaca: Beiträge des IX. Deutschen Syrologentages in Eichstätt 2016* (EBCO 6; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2018), 61–70.

¹⁴ Most emphatically, see T. Jansma, “Narsai’s Homilies on Creation: Remarks on a Recent Edition,” *Le Muséon* 83 (1970): 209–235; idem, “Narsai and Ephraem: Some Observations on Narsai’s Homilies on Creation and Ephraem’s Hymns on Faith,” *PdO* 1 (1970): 49–68; idem, “Narsai’s dubbele erfenis. Enkele opmerkingen over de invloed van Theodorus van Mopsueste en van Efraïm de Syriër,” *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* NS 51 (1970–1971): 1–15. These articles are a response to Gignoux, who considers Ephrem to have had little importance for Narsai (see Gignoux, *Homélie de Narsai sur la création*, 470). For Gignoux’s response to Jansma’s critiques, see P. Gignoux, “Réflexions sur l’article de M. Jansma,” *Le Muséon* 83 (1970): 237–240. For later studies, a couple of which also bring Jacob of Serugh into the conversation, see Frishman, *The Ways and Means of the Divine Economy*, 3.37–39, 180–183, *passim*; Molenberg, “Narsai’s Memra on the Reproof of Eve’s Daughters and the ‘Tricks and Devices’ They Perform”; Van Rompay, “Humanity’s Sin in Paradise.”

¹⁵ For Narsai’s Christology, see J. Frishman, “Narsai’s Christology according to his Homily ‘On the Word became Flesh,’” *Harp* 8/9 (1995/96), 289–303; A. Satyaputra, “Reexamining Narsai’s Christology: On the Two Natures of Christ,” *STJ* 6:1–2 (1998): 23–32. For the dual heritage of Narsai, see Jansma’s studies in the previous footnote, including especially his title “Narsai’s dubbele erfenis” for my language, along with the dissent by Gignoux.

in theology, including liturgical theology, sacramental theology, eschatology, soteriology, pneumatology, and Mariology, to name only a few.¹⁶ In addition, no figure writing in Syriac shaped East Syriac biblical exegesis, especially in its nascent stage, more than Narsai.¹⁷

Given his importance for the Church of the East, Narsai understandably has a wide and varied *Nachleben*. The Catholicos Timothy I (d. 823), for instance, mentions Narsai a number of times throughout his letters: In *Letter 47*, for instance, Timothy requests that a manuscript of *mēm̄rē* by Narsai be copied and sent to him.¹⁸ Isho'dad of Merv (fl. ca. 850) frequently relies on Narsai in his bib-

¹⁶ Among the many relevant publications that could be cited here, see P. Gignoux, "Les doctrines eschatologiques de Narsai," *OS 11* (1966): 321–352, 461–488; 12 (1967): 23–54; F. G. McLeod, *The Soteriology of Narsai* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1973); I. Arickappallil, *The Holy Spirit in Narsai of Nisibis: A Theological Synthesis* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1992); idem, "The Pneumatological Vision of Mar Narsai," *The Harp* 8–9 (1995–1996): 195–208; M. A. Kappes, "The Voice of Many Waters: The Baptismal Homilies of Narsai of Nisibis," *SP 33* (1997): 534–547; F. Kanichikattil, *Divine Liturgy in the Vision of Narsai* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2003); A. Harrak, "Memra 33 of Narsai: The Sacramental Nature of the 'Church of the Nations,'" *PdO 41* (2015): 181–203; S. Joseph, "Askese und Gelehrsamkeit: Das monastische Leben des Narsai von Nisibis, ein ostsyrisches Beispiel," in D. W. Winkler (ed.), *Syrische Studien: Beiträge zum 8. Deutschen Syrologie-Symposium in Salzburg 2014* (OPO 10; Wien: LIT Verlag, 2016), 73–79.

¹⁷ For a brief overview, see L. Van Rompay, "The Christian Syriac Tradition of Interpretation," in M. Sæbø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament. The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. I. *From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (Until 1300)*, part 1. *Antiquity* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 635–636. For studies, see, *inter alia*, J. Frishman, "Type and Reality in the Exegetical Homilies of Mar Narsai," *SP 20* (1989): 169–175; eadem, *The Ways and Means of the Divine Economy*, especially part 3; K. S. Heal, "Reworking the Biblical Text in the Dramatic Dialogue Poems on the Old Testament Patriarch Joseph," in R. B. ter Haar Romeny (ed.), *The Peshitta: Its Use in Literature and Liturgy. Papers Read at the Third Peshitta Symposium* (MPI 15; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 87–98; T. Kuzhuppil, *The Vision of the Prophet Isaiah: A Theological Study of Narsai's Interpretation of Isaiah 6* (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 2006); R. A. Kitchen, "Winking at Jonah: Narsai's Interpretation of Jonah for the Church of the East," in V. S. Hovhannessian (ed.), *The Old Testament as Authoritative Scripture in the Early Churches of the East* (BCOT 1; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010), 51–56; Thome, "Jona – Typos Christi;" C. Pasquet, "La distinction créateur/création: Principe et fondement de l'interprétation de Gn 1, 1–2 chez Éphrem et Narsai (IVe–Ve siècles)," in B. Bakhouché (ed.), *Science et exégèse: Les interprétations antiques et médiévales du récit biblique de la création des éléments (Genèse 1,1–8)* (BÉHÉSIR 167; Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 129–145; K. S. Heal, "Construal and Construction of Genesis in Early Syriac Sermons," *SP 78* (2017): 25–32; Kitchen, "Three Young Men Redux"; idem, "Which One Is He? Narsai of Nisibis on Moses and the Divine Name and Essence and a Few Plagues," *JCSSS 18* (2018): 15–23.

¹⁸ For Timothy I, see V. Berti, *Vita e studi di Timoteo I patriarca cristiano di Baghdad* (SI 41; Paris: Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes, 2009). The *Letters* by Timothy I are in the process of being (re-)edited by M. Heimgartner: *Timotheos I, Ostsyrischer Patriarch, Disputation mit dem Kalifen Al-Mahdi* (CSCO 631–632; Leuven: Peeters, 2011); *Die Briefe 42–58 des ostsyrischen Patriarchen Timotheos I* (CSCO 644–645; Leuven: Peeters, 2012); *Die Briefe 30–39 des ostsyrischen Patriarchen Timotheos I* (CSCO 661–662; Leuven: Peeters, 2016); *Die Briefe 40 und 41 des ostsyrischen Patriarchen Timotheos I* (CSCO 673–674; Leuven: Peeters, 2019). This particular reference is found in Heimgartner, *Die Briefe 42–58 des Ostsyrischen Patriarchen Timotheos I*, 87.29–30 (Syriac), 72 (GT). An earlier edition is available in O. Braun, "Ein

lical commentaries, citing him by name a number of times.¹⁹ A century later, Emmanuel bar Shakhare (d. 980) makes extensive use of Narsai in his *Hexaameron*, which consists of twenty-eight *mēmṛē*, the first of which is actually probably by Narsai.²⁰ To take one final example, the thirteenth-century poet Gewargis Warda draws significantly from Narsai in his collection of poems (*ʿonyāṭā*).²¹

Narsai is said to have authored a sizeable oeuvre. The largest inventory is given by ‘Abdisho’ bar Brikha in his *Catalogue of Books*:

commentaries on Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, (Joshua) Bar Nun, Judges, Qohelet, Isaiah, the Twelve (prophets), Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Prophecy of Daniel as well as *mēmṛē* in twelve volumes, 360 in number. He also had a liturgy and an interpretation of the sacraments and baptism as well as consolations with sermons, praises, proclamations, adorations, and a book on the depravity of life.²²

The *Ecclesiastical History* of Barḥadbshabba similarly states that Narsai composed a *mēmṛā* for each day of the year, whereas the *Cause of the Foundation of the Schools* gives the number of *mēmṛē* as around 300, along with other writings.²³ Among all these works, only a little over eighty *mēmṛē* of Narsai’s survive.²⁴

Brief des Katholikos Timotheos I über biblische Studien des 9. Jahrhunderts,” *OC* 1 (1901): 299–313. For an English translation of this letter, see S. P. Brock, *A Brief Outline of Syriac Literature* (Kottayam: SEERI, 1997), 245–250.

¹⁹ Isho’dad’s commentary on the Old Testament is edited in J.-M. Vosté and C. Van den Eynde, *Išo’dad de Merv. Commentaire de l’Ancien Testament*, I (CSCO 126; Leuven: Peeters, 1950); C. Van den Eynde, *Išo’dad de Merv. Commentaire de l’Ancien Testament*, I, II–VI (CSCO 156, 176, 179, 229–230, 303–304, 328–29, 433–34; Leuven: Peeters, 1950–1981). See also Frishman, *The Ways and Means of the Divine Economy*, 3.7, 185–186, *passim*.

²⁰ See Frishman, *The Ways and Means of the Divine Economy*, 3.17 and L. Van Rompay, “Emmanuel bar Shakhare,” in *GEDSH*, 143–144 as well as, with more detail, E. ten Napel, “The Textual Tradition of Emmanuel bar Shakhare’s Hexaameron in the Light of the Monastic School Tradition,” *SP* 18 (1990): 289–295.

²¹ See A. Pritula, “Die Hymnensammlung Wardā und die Homilien Narsais: Wege der syrischen Dichtung im 13. Jahrhundert,” in M. Tamcke (ed.), *Orientalische Christen und Europa: Kulturbegegnung zwischen Interferenz, Partizipation und Antizipation* (GOS 41; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), 159–171; idem, *The Wardā: An East Syriac Hymnological Collection. Study and Critical Edition* (GOS 47; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2015), 133–143, *passim*.

²² Ed. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, 3.1.63–66. A similar, but slightly shorter inventory is found in the earlier, tenth-century *Chronicle of Siirt* (ed. Scher et al., *Histoire nestorienne [Chronique de Séert]*, 2.1.115).

²³ *Ecclesiastical History* (ed. Nau, *La seconde partie de l’histoire de Barhadbesabba ‘Arbaia*, 612; trans. Becker, *Sources for the Study of the School of Nisibis*, 69); *Cause of the Foundation of the Schools* (ed. Scher, *Mar Barhadbsabba ‘Arbaya. Évêque de Ḥalwan [VI^e siècle]. Cause de la fondation des écoles*, 386; trans. Becker, *Sources for the Study of the School of Nisibis*, 152).

²⁴ The most convenient listing of the extant *mēmṛē* attributed to Narsai is S. P. Brock, “A Guide to Narsai’s Homilies,” *Hugoye* 12 (2009): 21–40. For one potential addition, see A. M. Butts, “Reclaiming Narsai’s *Mēmṛā* of the Feast of the Victorious Cross,” *Hugoye* 23 (2020): 3–30. Among the more than eighty extant *mēmṛē* attributed to Narsai some are probably not authentic: *Mēmṛā* 43 ‘*On the Martyrs*’, for instance, is almost certainly not by Narsai but by Jacob (ed. P. Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis* [Paris–Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1905–1910], 2.636–649). Similarly, *Mēmṛā* 30 ‘*On Palm Sunday*’ seems to be a later compilation

Most of the *mēm̄rē* are written in 12-syllable meter, with some in 7-syllable meter. Many, if not all, of them include biblical exegesis, and they deal with a variety of liturgical, moral, and theological topics.

The just over eighty or so *mēm̄rē* attributed to Narsai are preserved in more than two dozen manuscripts.²⁵ The oldest of these manuscripts is ms. Chaldean Patriarchate 71, which dates sometime between 1188 and 1288.²⁶ It is followed chronologically by two manuscripts from the Chaldean collection formerly in Diyarbakır but now in Mardin: ms. Diyarbakır 70 (1328) and ms. Diyarbakır 71 (14th–16th cent.).²⁷ There is then one manuscript dated to 1647: ms. Baghdad, Archbishopric of the Church of the East 45.²⁸ Another stems from 1705: ms. Chaldean Patriarchate 72.²⁹ The remainder of the manuscripts all date from the

and rewriting based on Narsai's *Mēm̄rā* 29 'On Palm Sunday' and Jacob's *Mēm̄rā* 'On Palm Sunday' (ed. Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, 5.613–631) (see J. Frishman, "Narsai's Homily for the Palm Festival – Against the Jews: For the Palm Festival or against the Jews?," in *SymSyr* IV, 221). Finally, *Mēm̄rā* 35 'On the Mysteries' is almost certainly not by Narsai, departing in various ways from the authentic corpus, in content as well as in language and style (see Frishman, *The Ways and Means of the Divine Economy*, 3.12–14; L. Abramowski, "Die liturgische Homilie des Ps. Narses mit dem Messbekenntnis und einem Theodor-Zitat," *BJRULM* 78 [1996]: 87–100; S. P. Brock, "Greek Words in Ephrem and Narsai: A Comparative Sampling," *ARAM* 12 [2000]: 327–328; idem, "A Guide to Narsai's Homilies," 39 fn. 42). For further discussion about these and possibly other spurious attributions to Narsai, see Frishman, *The Ways and Means of the Divine Economy*, 3.11–15. In addition, a series of four *mēm̄rē* on Joseph are attributed to Narsai in some manuscripts as well as to Jacob of Serugh in others (ed. P. Bedjan, *Liber superiorum, seu Historia Monastica, auctore Thoma, Episcopo Margensi. Liber Fundatorum Monasteriorum in regno Persarum et Arabum. Homiliae Mar-Narsetis in Joseph. Documenta Patrum de quibusdam verae fidei dogmatibus* [Paris–Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1901], 519–629). Heal has definitively shown that neither attribution is correct (K. S. Heal, *Tradition and Transformation: Genesis 37 and 39 in Early Syriac Sources* [Ph.D. Diss., University of Birmingham, 2008], 33–68). In addition to *mēm̄rē*, a number of *soḡyātā* are attributed to Narsai (ten are edited in A. Mingana, *Narsai Doctoris Syri Homiliae et Carmina* [Mosul: Typis Fratrum Praedicatorum, 1905], 2.366–411; see also F. Feldmann, *Syrische Wechsellieder von Narses: Ein Beitrag zur altchristlichen syrischen Hymnologie, nach einer Handschrift der Königlichen Bibliothek in Berlin* [Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1896]). These are, however, all likely spurious.

²⁵ See the still indispensable listing in W. F. Macomber, "The Manuscripts of the Metrical Homilies of Narsai," *OCP* 39 (1973): 275–306.

²⁶ For this manuscript, see Macomber, "The Manuscripts of the Metrical Homilies of Narsai," 280–281; A. Scher, "Notice sur les manuscrits syriaques conservés dans la bibliothèque du Patriarcat chaldéen de Mossoul," *Revue des Bibliothèques* 17 (1907): 245.

²⁷ For these two manuscripts, see Macomber, "The Manuscripts of the Metrical Homilies of Narsai," 281–282; A. Scher, "Notice sur les manuscrits syriaques et arabes conservés à l'archevêché chaldéen de Diarbékir," *JA* 10.1 (1907): 361–362 and 365–366. Images of both of these manuscripts are available from the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library under the shelf-marks CCM 578 and CCM 397, respectively.

²⁸ This manuscript was unknown to Macomber. For description, see Heal, *Tradition and Transformation*, 43–47.

²⁹ For this manuscript, see Macomber, "The Manuscripts of the Metrical Homilies of Narsai," 283; Scher, "Notice sur les manuscrits syriaques conservés dans la bibliothèque du Patriarcat chaldéen de Mossoul," 245. Images of this manuscript are also available from the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, under the shelf-mark CPB 105.

late nineteenth century into the early twentieth century, but are nonetheless still valuable for the textual and transmission history of Narsai.³⁰

In 1905, Alphonse Mingana published a collection (not critically edited) of forty-seven *mēm̄rē* attributed to Narsai.³¹ In 1970, a facsimile edition of a relatively recent manuscript (dated to 1901) containing seventy-two *mēm̄rē* was published by the Patriarchal Press.³² Together, Mingana's and the Patriarchal Press's publications make available many of Narsai's extant *mēm̄rē* but not all of them, and none critically edited.³³ Several *mēm̄rē* have been published separately in critical editions (of varying quality).³⁴ But, most *mēm̄rē* await proper critical editions, and several lack any edition at all.³⁵ In addition, the majority of *mēm̄rē* have never been translated into a Western language.³⁶

³⁰ See A. M. Butts, "A Misapplication of *eliminatio codicum descriptorum* in the Manuscript Tradition of Narsai (d. ca. 500)," *Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies Bulletin* 5.2 (2019): 77–100. By 'textual and transmission history', I refer to G. Pasquali, *Storia della tradizione e critica del testo* (2nd ed.; Firenze: F. Le Monnier, 1952).

³¹ Mingana, *Narsai Doctoris Syri Homiliae et Carmina*.

³² Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII, *Homilies of Mar Narsai* (San Francisco: Patriarchal Press, 1970).

³³ An immensely useful set of indices between these two publications is available in Brock, "A Guide to Narsai's Homilies."

³⁴ In chronological order: Martin, "Homélie de Narses sur les trois docteurs nestoriens"; Gignoux, *Homélie de Narsai sur la création*; McLeod, *Narsai's Metrical Homilies on the Nativity, Epiphany, Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension*; E. P. Siman, *Narsai. Cinq homélie sur les paraboles évangéliques* (Paris: Cariscript, 1984); Frishman, *The Ways and Means of the Divine Economy*, parts 1 and 2.

³⁵ Belonging to the latter category are *Mēm̄rā 17 'For Any Saints Day'*; *Mēm̄rā 32 'On the Canaanite Woman'* (though an edition is in preparation by Erin Galgay Walsh); *Memrā 51 'On the Antichrist'*.

³⁶ For published translations, see Brock, "A Guide to Narsai's Homilies." To help fill this lacuna in the scholarly literature, the three editors of the present volume direct an ambitious project to translate all the extant *mēm̄rē* of Narsai into English. The *mēm̄rē* are being translated by an international team of almost three dozen scholars.

Exegesis, Askesis, and Identity

Narsai's *Mēmṛā* on the Parable of the Ten Virgins

Daniel Becerra

The study of Narsai's homiletical exegesis over the past several decades has tended to focus predominantly on three interrelated matters of inquiry: 1) Narsai's understanding of a particular passage, theme, or figure in scripture,¹ 2) Narsai's exposition of specific theological concepts and concerns,² and 3) Narsai's interpretive method and its relation to that of his predecessors, contemporaries, and successors.³ To date, however, few studies have adequately accounted for a

¹ See, for example, A. H. Becker, "The 'Evil Inclination' of the Jews: The Syriac Yatsra in Narsai's Metrical Homilies for Lent," *JQR* 106 (2016): 179–207; K. Heal, *Tradition and Transformation: Genesis 37 and 39 in Early Syriac Sources* (Ph.D. Diss., University of Birmingham, 2008); R. Kitchen, "Winking at Jonah: Narsai's Interpretation of Jonah for the Church of the East," in V. Hovhannessian (ed.), *The Old Testament as Authoritative Scripture in the Early Churches of the East* (BCOT 1; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010), 51–56; P. Komban, "Second Reading about Joseph by Narsai," in P. Kochappilly (ed.), *The Folly of the Cross: Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Varghese Pathikulangara, CMI* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications/Kottayam: Denha, 2000), 313–324; C. Payngot, "The Homily of Narsai on the Virgin Mary," *Harp* 13 (2000): 33–37.

² See, for example, I. Arickappallil, "The Folly of the Cross and the Glory of Resurrection in Mar Narsai," in *Folly of the Cross*, 18–30; idem, "Die nachephesinische Christologie der edessenischen Theodorianer," in L. Greisiger, C. Rammelt, and J. Tubach (eds.), *Edessa in hellenistisch-römischer Zeit: Religion, Kultur und Politik zwischen Ost und West. Beiträge des internationalen Edessa-Symposiums in Halle an der Saale, 14.–17. Juli 2005* (BTS 116; Beirut: Orient-Institut/Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2009), 1–9; idem, *The Holy Spirit in Narsai of Nisibis: A Theological Synthesis* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1992); T. Kuzhuppil, *The Vision of the Prophet Isaiah: A Theological Study of Narsai's Interpretation of Isaiah 6* (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 2006); J. Frishman, "Narsai's Christology according to his Homily 'On the Word became Flesh,'" *Harp* 8/9 (1995/96): 289–303; F. G. McLeod, "Man as the Image of God: Its Meaning and Theological Significance in Narsai," *TS* 42 (1981): 458–468; A. Satyaputra, "Reexamining Narsai's Christology: On the Two Natures of Christ," *STJ* 6 (1998): 23–32.

³ See, for example, L. Abramowski, "Narsai, Ephräm und Kyrill über Jesu Verlassenheits-ruf Matth. 27,46," in H.-J. Feulner, E. Velkovska, and R. F. Taft (eds.), *Crossroad of Cultures: Studies in Liturgy and Patristics in Honor of Gabriele Winkler* (OCA 260; Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2000), 43–67; J. Frishman, "Type and Reality in the Exegetical Homilies of Mar Narsai," *SP* 20 (1989): 169–175; E. Matthews, Jr., "What Manner of Man?: Early Syriac Reflections on Adam," in R. Miller (ed.), *Syriac and Antiochian Exegesis and Biblical Theology for the 3rd Millennium* (GECS 6; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2008), 115–149; F. G. McLeod, "Narsai's Dependence on Theodore of Mopsuestia," *JCSSS* 7 (2007): 18–38; T. Jansma, "Narsai's dubbele erfenis. Enkele opmerkingen over de invloed van Theodorus van Mopsueste en van

significant element of Narsai's exegetical endeavors within the homiletical context – the assumption that scriptural exegesis was not an end in itself but a tool for facilitating the spiritual development of an audience. As Kristian Heal has insightfully observed, “Narsai had a very clear objective for his audience, and indeed for himself; namely to become like the very scriptural figures whose lives were so often the focus of his homilies ... He repeatedly called people ... to measure their lives against the biblical saints, and change accordingly.”⁴

The present article attends to this lacuna in scholarship by looking beyond what Narsai intended his homilies to say and instead examining what he might have envisioned them to do.⁵ Limiting my analysis to *Mēmra* 27 ‘*On the Parable of the Ten Virgins*,’⁶ my approach is informed by the work of several scholars – notably C. M. Chin, Paul Kolbet, David Brakke, and Peter Martens – who have sought to illuminate the relationship of exegesis and the formation of ascetic subjects in late ancient Christianity more broadly. Departing from more traditional approaches to studying biblical interpretation, which typically focus on the methods and products of exegesis, as well on their utility for negotiating cultural discourses, these scholars have turned their attention to the correlation between the interpretive act and the intellectual, spiritual, and moral formation of Christian readers and listeners, particularly within communal contexts.⁷ Accordingly,

Efraïm de Syriër,” *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* NS 51 (1970–1971): 1–15; L. Van Rompay, “Humanity’s Sin in Paradise: Ephrem, Jacob of Sarug, and Narsai in Conversation,” in G. A. Kiraz (ed.), *Jacob of Serugh and His Times: Studies in Sixth-Century Syriac Christianity* (GECS 8; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2010), 199–217; F. Thome, “Jona – Typos Christi. Narsais Memra über Jona im Lichte der Exegese Theodors von Mopsuestia zum Jonabuch,” in D. Bumazhnov, E. Grypeou, T. Sailors, and A. Toepel (eds.), *Bibel, Byzanz und Christlicher Orient: Festschrift für Stephen Gerö zum 65. Geburtstag* (OLA 187; Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 363–386; G. Vavanikunnel (ed.), *Homilies and Interpretation of Holy Qurbana, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Narsai and Gabriel Qatraya Bar Lipah* (Sandesanilayam: Changanacherry Publications, 1977).

⁴ Kristian Heal, “Narsai and the Scriptural Self” in this volume (pp. 133–143).

⁵ I am indebted to Chin for this phrasing. See C. Chin, “‘Who is the Ascetic Exegete?’ Angels, Enchantments, and Transformative Food in Origen’s *Homilies on Joshua*,” in H.-U. Weidemann (ed.), *Asceticism and Exegesis in Early Christianity: Reception and Use of New Testament Texts in Ancient Christian Ascetic Discourses* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 208.

⁶ Ed. Mingana l.243–56 and Siman 6–22. I follow the former in this article but preserve the paragraphs and numbering of Siman’s edition for convenience and in conformity with recent scholarship. Nin provides a brief introduction to the work in M. Nin, “Lomelia sulle dieci vergini (Mt 25,1–13) di Narsai di Edessa,” in E. Vergani and S. Chialà (eds.), *Storia, cristologia e tradizioni della Chiesa Siro-orientale. Atti del 3° Incontro sull’Oriente Cristiano di tradizione siriana: Milano, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, 14 maggio 2004* (Ecumenismo e dialogo; Milan: Centro Ambrosiano, 2006), 115–129.

⁷ D. Brakke, “Reading the New Testament and Transforming the Self in Evagrius of Pontus,” in Weidemann (ed.), *Asceticism and Exegesis*, 284–299; Chin, “Who is the Ascetic Exegete,” 203–218; S. Davis, *Coptic Christology in Practice: Incarnation and Divine Participation in Late Antique and Medieval Egypt* (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); P. Dilley, *Monasteries and the Care of Souls in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 122–147; S.A. Harvey, “Liturgy and Ethics in Ancient Syriac Christianity: Two Paradigms,” *SCE* 26 (2013): 300–316; D. Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects: Christian*

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